

Interrogating the Influence of Poverty on Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

Poverty is an economic and social menace in Sub-Sahara Africa, Nigeria inclusive. It is a condition that affects all aspects of the life of its victims. Those who are poor are prone to diverse problems, which range from condition of helplessness, lack of basic necessities of life, voicelessness in decision making, ill health, lack of access to education, etc. Many Nigerians are in this situation of abject poverty. Majority of the people in Nigeria live below the poverty line and cannot afford the basic needs of life that make life worth living. Thus, in the bid to make ends meet, they engage in nefarious activities that constitute problems not only to the few rich but even to the large army of Nigerians. Some of the social ills linked to the prevalence of poverty include: armed robbery, terrorism, militancy, kidnapping, ritual killing, pipeline vandalism, political thuggery, etc. has thus become the harbinger of insecurity in Nigeria all of which have been associated with weak and inefficient government. Using secondary data, this paper attempt to build a nexus between the severity of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction

“No Society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which by far the greater part of the numbers are miserable” (Adam Smith, 1776)

Nigeria in the 21st Century aptly captures the above submission of Adam Smith. The country is critically battling with the twin problems of poverty and insecurity and life can best be described in the Hobbesian claim as brutish, nasty and short. Nigeria is a Federal Republic comprising thirty-six States and Abuja; the Federal Capital Territory. Nigeria is located in West Africa on the Gulf of Guinean and has a total area of 923,768 Km² (Lancia, 2011). The country has a population of 172,713,388 million there by making it the house of the largest concentration of Blacks in the world (Bureau of Statistics, 2010). In spite of the resource endowment of the country, especially with the numerous sold minerals, commercial quantities of oil and vast agricultural potentials, the solid mineral sector has been seemingly under-developed if not out rightly neglected thus forcing a concentration on oil exploration and exploitation. Again, the vast potentials of Agriculture where nearly seventy percent of the population are engaged is untapped owing to the over-concentration on oil wealth. Agriculture has thus remained subsistence rather than commercial in outlook. This has thus skewed the country's GDP heavily in favor of revenue from oil including its attendant vagaries. The inadequate attention of government to the agricultural sector has equally resulted in massive rural to urban migration in spite of the shortfall in the carrying capacities of the urban centers. Unemployment thus soared just as crime pervades in the cities.

Majority of the people in Nigeria live below the poverty line most especially in the rural areas and urban slums. Although, there are affluent individuals mostly the top political class and their business allies, their riches are not felt in the country's economic landscape to the extent that a huge sense of insecurity pervades. The threat to peace and security include terrorism, armed robbery, ritual killing, political assassinations, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping for ransom amongst many others. Thus, Nigeria can best be described as a country whose poverty situation has mutated and developed into a cancerous security threat arising from her army of unemployed citizenry.

Nigeria became Independent from British rule on October 1, 1960, after centuries of colonial rule. However, the country was plunged into military rule from 1966 till October 1979 when a Civilian government was instituted. The civilian government lasted till 1983 when it was again overthrown by the Military and Nigeria was thus under military rule till May 29, 1999.

In spite of the seemingly bright economic outlook at Independence, Nigeria's story has been less than charitable particularly in deploying the resources to providing the enabling environment that could guarantee equality and equity through which her citizens could be assured of decent livelihood. Several factors are identifiable as the causes of the nation's tragedy.

First was the political crisis of the immediate years of independence which threatened the nation's sovereignty as well as national security. Political intolerance and the zero sum game politics of the time polarized the nation along regional and ethnic lines to the extent that national institutions were virtually crippled. The military coup in 1966 produced greater divisions than it sought to prevent and the following counter coup merely consolidated the mutual mistrust thus resulting in national distraught, instability and the eventual devastating civil war.

Much as the political crisis provided the platform for the emergence of Nigeria's development tragedy, the series of economic policies of the immediate years of independence as well as the outcomes thereafter sustained the malady till date. Of particular importance was the content and texture of the nation's first National Development Plan 1962 – 68 which placed heavy reliance on external sources of funds. In that particular plan, foreign aid accounted for half of the projected investment expenditure. This was a misnomer economic policy given the fact that Nigeria's economy at that period was heavily agro-based hence the external inflow of funds were directed principally at energizing the sector which products depended wholly on the vagaries of the Western market. In other words, the industrial sector that should have been focused upon through value addition to the local agricultural products benefitted very little; if any, from the Plans.

Conversely and learning from the pitfalls of the First National Development Plan, was the birth of the Second National Development Plans 1970 – 74. This Second Plan took the national government to the centre stage in the commanding heights of the economy. The Plan was to also address the post-civil war reconstruction effort of the government. This involved the enhancement of government participation in Agriculture as well as the promotion of domestic industries through the policy of import substitution, Abdulsalami and Abubakar, (1989: 227). Consequently, the indigenization Decree was promulgated with a view to transferring the ownership of those enterprises previously wholly owned by foreigners to indigenous entrepreneurs. Anyanwu et al (1999: 95), posited that the policy was aimed at accelerating Nigeria's industrial growth and halt the capital flight of the First National Development Plans.

The oil boom of the post civil war era brought in profligacy in Nigeria as the Third Development Plan 1975 – 1978 was developed and thus reinforced government presence in the production end of the economy. As Obadan (2000: 45) rightly observed:

“In context and content of the Second and Third National Development Plans, 1979 – 74 and 1975 -80, not only did government strive to occupy the commanding heights of the economy, it effectively became the engine of growth with huge investment in the economic, social and infrastructural sectors”

The economic recklessness of the oil boom era and the huge corruption of the time coincided with the dwindling oil revenue of the 1980s as well as the Fourth National Development Plans 1981 -85. The stabilization measures of 1982 were thus introduced to address the downward slide in the economy. It bears reason to note that the failure of the policy resulted in the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Measures of 1986 -1993. Much has been written about the consequences of the Structural Adjustment Policy, suffice it to emphasize that it ripped open the nation's economy, devalued its currency, exacerbated the inflationary rate and promoted untoward socio-economic disequilibrium; including a pool of unemployed graduates and dwindled purchasing power.

The Liberalization policy of 1999-2003 represents a frontal attack on the negative consequences of the preceding policy of SAP. Yet, in content and orientation, it flowed from the dictates of the Breton Woods Institutions thus making its impact not significantly dissimilar from the preceding policy. Amongst the crux of the policy was the payment of the nation's external debt, the liberalization of the telecommunications industry, monetisation of fringe benefits of public servants and the alienation of Federal government properties. Government equally divested its interests in a number of commercial enterprises thus proclaiming the reign of the private sector. However, rather than resulting in the reversal of the socio-economic disequilibrium in the country, it merely reinforced it. Wealth merely became concentrated in the hands of few individuals who are mostly proven government cronies.

The totality of these policies maintained a common denomination. They utterly failed to address the inequality between the rich and the poor, promote corruption and progressively alienated the citizenry. This manifests in the astronomical increase in the rate of unemployment, poverty and squalor.

Poverty amongst other ills assumed the centre stage and got broadened in horizon to the extent that it now threatens the very essence of the Nigerian Nation through insecurity.

3.0. Poverty in Nigeria: Analysis

At this juncture, it is important to highlight the very essence of poverty which though has a global character but has deepened in intensity in Nigeria. Globally, 40 percent of the World's Population lives with the reality of poverty which threatens their survival (Gustavo and Kostas, 2007). As an economic situation, it is widespread, severe, multifaceted and multi-dimensional (Mbaya, et-al, 2000). If poverty is defined from the perspective of basic needs according to UNICEF, certain basic universal needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter will be regarded as being important to keep people out of poverty. Poverty is therefore being defined as deprivation in the material requirement for minimally acceptable fulfillment of human needs including food (UNICEF, 1986). Using the definition, UNICEF identified more than 69.5% of Nigeria population as living in poverty.

The phenomenon of poverty has manifested excruciatingly in Nigeria since the early 1980s. Available data on poverty in Nigeria shows that since the 1980s, poverty has taken various forms: manifesting in various guises in the rural and urban household and individual levels.

Table 1.1: Trends in Poverty Level: 1980 – 2004

Year	Poverty Level (%)	Estimated Population (Million)	Population in Poverty
1980	28.1	65	17.7m
1985	46.3	75	34.7m
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2m
1996	65.6	102	67.1m
2004	54.4	126.3	68.7m

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

For example as shown in the table above, between 1980 and 1985, and between 1992 and 1996, the incidence of poverty increased sharply. In 1980, the incidence was 28.1%. This increased to 46.3% in 1985 but declined to 42.7% 1992; a reprieve that was rubbished with its rise to 65.6% in 1996 (FOS, 1999:24). By 2004, it dropped to 54.4% (NBS, 2005:21)

The above percentages make more meaning if viewed against the actual population representation. In this regard, the 27.2% for 1980 translated to 17.7 million persons and later increased to 34.7 million persons in 1985. The population in 1996 was 67.1 million and 68.7 million persons in 2004 as shown in Table 1.1 above.

Again from table 1.2 below, between 1980 to 2004, the population of the core poor increased from 6.3% to 12.1 in 1985. This increased further to 13.9% and 29.3% in 1996 (FOS, 1996:24). By 2004, however, the core poor reduced to 22% (NBS, 2005:21).

Table 1.2: Percentage Distribution of Population

Year	Core Poor	Moderately Poor	Non-Poor
1980	6.2	21.0	72.8
1985	12.1	34.2	53.7
1992	13.9	28.9	57.3
1996	29.3	36.3	34.4
2004	22.0	32.4	43.3
2010	38.7	30.3	31.0

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010

Similarly, table 1.2 above shows that the moderately poor and the non-poor stood at 21.0% and 72.8% in 1980 respectively. By 1985, the figures were 34.2% and 53.7% respectively. The moderately poor declined to 28.9% in 1992, thus making the percentage of the non-poor to rise to 57.3%. By 1996, the moderately poor has again increased to 35.3% with a similar decline of the non-poor to 34.4%. At the close of year 2004, 32.4% of Nigerians were in the category of the moderately poor with the non-poor rising to 43.3%.

The trend in urban poverty is no less different as it showed progressive increase over the years.

What is evident in these comparisons is that while urban poverty, though increased sharply between 1985 and 1996, witnessed significant decline by the close of 2004, same cannot be said about rural poverty which kept increasing at near geometric progression, thus making the gap between rural and urban poverty to be more pronounced. And given the nature of the country, where people reside more in the rural areas, the implication of this figure is brought into bolder relief.

Table 1.3: Poverty Profile According to Rural/Urban

Year	Urban	Rural
1980	17.2	23.3
1985	37.8	51.4
1992	37.5	46.0
1996	58.2	69.3
2004	43.2	63.3

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

From the above table, it is evident that while urban poverty stood at 17.2% in 1980, it was 37.5% in 1992 and 58.2% in 1996. By 2004, it declined to 43.2%. Similarly, rural poverty grew from 23.3% in 1980 to 51.4% in 1985. Its decline to 46.0% in 1992 was rubbished by its phenomenal rise to 69.3% in 1996. The trend in its rise in the rural sector was not yet abated as it still stood at 63.3% in 2004.

Table 1.4 below gives a clearer indication of the trend in the incidence of poverty according to geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

Table1.4: Poverty Incidence by Geopolitical Zones

Zone	1980	1985	1992	1997	2004	2010
South – West	13.4	42.0	43.1	74.1	43.0	59.1
South – East	12.9	30.9	41.0	79.5	26.7	67.5
South – South	13.2	38.0	40.8	78.6	35.1	63.7
North-Central	32.2	48.4	36.5	62.0	71.2	77.7
North-East	35.6	53.2	54.0	68.0	72.2	76.3
North-West	37.7	48.4	36.5	62.0	71.2	77.5

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria and National Bureau of Statistics

From the table above, it is clear that indeed, poverty is not an exclusive preserve of any geopolitical zone in Nigeria. Rather, the difference lies in the intensity hence while 59.1% of the population in South West Nigeria are poor in 2010, 67% were poor in South East and 63% in the South-South in the same period. Conversely, 77.7% in the North Central were poor in 2010 as against the 76.3% in the North East. The North West recorded 77.5% of poor residents in the same 2010.

The subjective measurement of poverty allows the individuals to assess what they consider to be a decent or minimally adequate standard of living. Table 1.5.

Table 1.5: Subjective Measurement of Poverty Sector

Sector	Poor (%)	Non – Poor (%)
Urban	70.7	29.3
Rural	79.2	20.8
Total	75.5	24.5

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

Table 1.6 below further illustrates the subjective measure of poverty according to geopolitical zones. from the table, 74.8% are poor in the South-South,77.6% in the South East and 71.5% in the South West. The Northern Region showed greater percentage in the population of the poor. in this regard, 80% were considered poor in the North Central, 81.8% in the North East and 71.9% in the North West.

Table 1.6: Subjective Measurement of Poverty by Geo-Political Zones

Zone	Poor (%)	Non-Poor (%)
South - South	74.8	25.2
South – East	77.6	22.4
South – West	71.5	28.5
North – Central	80.0	20.0
North - East	81.8	18.2
North – West	71.9	28.1
Total	75.5	24.5

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

From the above table, a total of 75.5% of Nigerians considered themselves poor, while only 24.5% are considered as non – poor. This discovery bears relevance to the study by revealing the alarming percentage of Nigerians who are poor and cannot afford the basic needs of life. This takes us to the issue of insecurity in the country.

4.0 Poverty and Insecurity: What Nexus?

In a study by the Brookings Institute, it was discovered that only 10% of the global poor live in stable low income countries as against 40% who live in fragile and conflict affected countries. Poverty aptly described as a state of lack; want and deprivation is a phenomenon without bias for race, ethnicity, religion with extensive global reach. The intensity of poverty is often times reinforced by such factors as resource deficiency, faulty development plans, political, religious and ethnic strives which more often than not negatively impact on national security and wellbeing of the citizenry. As a phenomenon, poverty has a penetrating destabilizing effect on social cohesion within, between and amongst nations. The ultimate consequences of poverty are the hopelessness it engenders in any polity with dire consequences for growth and development. It is within this breadth that poverty provides veritable accommodation for insecurity. From the foregoing analysis of poverty in Nigeria, it is clear that majority of the Nigerian citizens live in abject poverty. Those who are subjectively poor and cannot afford the basic needs of life are more than the few who live in affluence. It is therefore pertinent to explain the concept of insecurity before espousing the link between it and poverty.

Most theories on poverty show that there is a connecting trend between poverty and insecurity. The progressive social theory readily addresses this issue. This theory looks not to the individual poverty but to the economic, political and social system which cause people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well-being. Karl Marx demonstrated how social and economic systems combined to initiate, promote and sustain poverty situations across cultures. For examples, Marx showed how capitalism created what he called the “reserved army of the unemployed” as a conscientious strategy to keep wages low. Studies by Jencks (1996:72) for example suggested that the extant economic system is structured in such a way that poor people fall behind regardless of how competent they may be. Those who do not have the link to government officials hardly get job in the formal sector while the private sector jobs equally demand connections from people who are influential in the society.

Insecurity accords a process or condition of exposure to danger, indeed a pervasive unsafe condition of existence. Given the understanding of the meaning and impact of poverty, it is safe to build a nexus between poverty and insecurity as a “cause and effect” syndrome. In other words, both are desirable as different sides of the same coin such that it is practically impossible to find one without the other accompanying it. And just as poverty impact on socio-economic and political circumstances of a people, so does insecurity manifests in the different segments of any society where poverty predominates, In the case of Nigeria, insecurity manifests in diverse ways and these cannot be dissociated from the ravaging poverty in the country.

Considering the case of Nigeria, insecurity manifests in different forms and this cannot be separated from the activities of the large army of unemployed and underemployed people in the country. Those who do not have means of livelihood readily take to criminal activities to survive or turn their angers against the society. The case of the Almajiris in the Northern part of Nigeria is worthy of mentioning here. These Children have no means of livelihood except through begging. Thus they are easily recruited as foot soldiers by the Boko-Haram Sect to unleash terror on the innocent citizens of the country.

5.0 Manifestations of Insecurity in Nigeria

Insecurity is a problem that is very conspicuous in Nigeria. It manifests in diverse ways. These range from organized violent gangs or groups to the one-man gun killing criminals and the street prowling armed robbers. The sadistic rapists that rape and kill and those who gang rape. The police officers that shoot indiscriminately when they are not given bribe by the citizens and those who are petty thieves. The cyber criminals as well as those whose specialty is to disguise their being to curry favor are rife. Kidnappings and bank fraud complement the legion

Although Nigeria has been witnessing security challenges in the past as is common to most societies, the Niger-Delta militancy actually heralded organized violent crimes and major security threats into the country. This manifests in random shooting and killing of innocent people, kidnapping of expatriates and destruction of huge public and private properties most especially in the oil and gas sector of Nigeria by different groups like MEND, MASSOB and other violent group in the South – South region. The Niger-Delta militants highlighted the political and economic marginalization of the Niger-Delta region that produce the wealth of the nation as reasons for their actions. The Amnesty granted the militant youths rather incentivized the kidnapping for ransom in the region and this of course has extended to other regions of the country, particularly the South East.

Another manifestation of insecurity in Nigeria is the activities of the Islamic Boko Haram Sect. While the Niger – Delta militancy can be viewed as political, the Boko Haram menace is religious and ideological. It came in the form of terrorism similar to the in approach used by the notorious international terrorist groups like the Al-Qaeda the Taliban. Many Christians were and are still being killed by these sects that claim that Sharia law must be entrenched in the country and Western Education is a crime. Even now Muslims are not spared. Churches and public places are being bombed by the suicide bombers. Of recent, they seemed to have acquired sophisticated weaponry which they deploy to killing of students in Schools in Northern Nigeria and bombing of police stations and army barracks

Armed robbery is another major insecurity issue in Nigeria. People hardly sleep with their eyes closed in most urban centres and even in broad day light people are gunned down by armed robbers. While the financial Sector, particularly, Banks and Bureau-de-Change are the major targets of these robbers, private individuals at home and in the Highways are not spared. Weapons like dynamites are used to blow the automated doors and vaults in the banks before carting away huge amounts of money and in the process people's lives are not spared. Rape has equally assumed an astronomical proportion in the country. It is in fact a complementary part of any violent action of recent as victims of kidnapping and armed robbery are often reportedly raped. Female gender are been terrorized by these rapists regardless of age, thus making the country unsafe for women and girls. Police officers that are supposed to secure lives and properties are gradually becoming agents of insecurity in the country. People who resist to give them bribe are being killed with in the guise of accidental discharge. Extra judicial killings are the pastimes of police officers and people live in fear of insecurity from all quarters.

6.0 Strategies for Sustainable Peace and Security in Nigeria

Government and people of Nigeria must work towards achieving sustainable peace and security to save the country from becoming a failed State. Thus, the following measures must be considered to ensure the country does not collapse.

The problem of poverty must be tackled aggressively through job creation. A review of the policies that promote small and medium scale industries is thus necessary as this could in the immediate absorb the unemployed. Value addition to primary products must be emphasized and export of raw Agricultural products must be discouraged. This measure will impact positively on industrial growth as well as enlarge the employment opportunities available.

The informal sector harbors majority of the people in the country most especially women. Government must make conscientious effort to provide sustainable poverty alleviation programmes for those in this sector to boost their trades and also the economy of the country. This will go a long way to alleviate the sufferings of those in this sector and encourage those who could not get job in the formal sector to find succor in this sector of the economy. Massive infrastructural development must be one of the priorities of the Federal, State and Local Governments; most especially at the rural areas and urban slums. Developing the rural areas will curb rural – urban drift.

The reduction in the influx of rural migrants to urban centres where there are no available jobs will surely reduce the incidence of armed robbery in the country.

Another important factor in curbing insecurity in Nigeria is to inculcate the essence of right values and need for security and peace into school curriculum. This will definitely have positive impacts on the orientation of Nigerian youths that are prone to committing crime in the society.

Closely related to the above is the re-orientation of Nigerians through the mass media on the importance of peace and security to ensure the continuous existence of the country. On the other hand, religious leaders must also preach the culture of tolerance to their "faithful" to ensure peaceful co-existence among the diverse people in the country. The secularity of the Nigerian nation must be respected by all; irrespective of religious affiliation.

Corruption remains one of the banes of development in Nigeria. It is therefore imperative that a top-bottom approach be used to curb corruption as leaders in the country are usually accused of being corrupt. Political leaders must therefore shun corrupt practices to ensure the trickledown effect of this on the citizens. This will surely lead to the development of the country and alleviate the problems of insecurity.

Institutions of government must be strengthened and adequate measures must be put in place for the training and re-training of security officers (Police officers, customs, soldiers etc.) to ensure cordial relationship between the civilian populace and the armed forces of Nigeria. This will make the armed forces regain the confidence of the citizens and ensure overall peace and security in the country.

7.0 Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that Nigeria is on the brink of total collapse due to insecurity and this will no doubt have negative impacts not only on the African region but also on the international community. It therefore behooves the Nigerian government, Nigerians and the international community to strive and curb the problem of insecurity in the country through poverty alleviation programmes, job creation, attraction of foreign direct investment and other measures that can significantly reduce poverty in the country.

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